

# Donovan Tells Story Of Cuban's Ransom

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## Exchange Plan "Exiles' Idea"

WASHINGTON (NANA)—James B. Donovan has revealed the inside story of the release of the Cuban freedom fighters captured in the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion.

The 44-year-old New York lawyer denied he acted as an "agent" for Atty. Gen. Robert F. Kennedy.

"I undertook this mission as a humanitarian assignment from the Cuban Families Committee before I ever knew that the attorney general was interested," Donovan said.

Donovan denied that the attorney general "brought the drug industry into this picture" to raise \$57,000,000 in ransom contributions.

"That simply is not true," Donovan declared. "I did it on a personal basis, acting through two friends."

DONOVAN said it is not true that Castro, at the last moment, came up with an "extortionate demand" for an additional \$2,925,000 in cash as indemnity for 60 badly wounded Cuban prisoners who had previously been returned to the United States.

"This was something the Cuban Families Committee agreed to last April, long before I ever became associated with this mission," Donovan explained.

Donovan arrived in Americans.

Donovan said that before the missile crisis in October, the committee had—on thought it had—pledges to cover the \$2,925,000 from other Cubans in the United States, Europe, and Latin America.

During the crisis, "all of the pledges were taken back. The Cubans were expecting an invasion, and everything else," he said.

DONOVAN said he received a phone call last summer from a Cuban businessman who asked whether he

could bring a group of Cuban refugees to see me on a recent basis.

The businessman was Robert W. Kean Jr., president of the Elizabethtown water company. Kean's wife is a Cuban, whose brother was among those being held prisoner.

"They came to my office," Donovan said. "There were four of them, including the second in command of the freedom brigade, one of the badly wounded prisoners who was released last April."

"They told me about the Cuban Families Committee. The committee included Protestants and Jews, although it was predominantly Catholic. They said I had been recommended to them by a highly placed person whose name they could not disclose."

DONOVAN agreed to represent the committee without any legal fee. But first, he said he must go to Washington and determine from government officials whether this mission would "conflict in any way with what remained of our Cuban policy."

"The Cubans smiled at each other, and informed me then that the highly placed person who had recommended me was Atty. Gen. Kennedy," Donovan said.

He did go to Washington, and conferred with the attorney general, Sec. of State Dean Rusk, and other officials. But, Donovan said, he did not talk with President Kennedy at any time about the prisoner exchange.

When Donovan arrived Cuba for his first visit on April 30, 1962, Havana was in midst of a military mobilization. Only a few days before the refugee Cuban student group known as "Alpha 68" had staged a hit-run attack on the Miramar section of Havana in two small motor boats with 20 mm. cannon.

The atmosphere was not conducive to negotiating, Donovan was accompanied by two Cubans from the United States, Alvaro Sotelo and Frederic Frevre.

They stayed at a run-down suburban villa owned by Jesus de los Heros, a former race-track owner. His wife, Mrs. Berna de los Heros, joined the negotiating team.

CASTRO sent his attorney general to see Donovan. "I made it clear to him that I would deal only with Castro," Donovan said.

"At the very first negotiating session, I explained to Castro that I could not consider any undertaking to raise cash," Donovan said. "I spent hours convincing him that he should accept food and medicine instead."

"Castro finally said to the three Cubans on the negotiating team: 'I will accept Dr. Donovan's humanitarian approach, and shall not deal with him in terms of money. However, I released to you last April 60 wounded prisoners on your firm pledge to pay their fines totaling \$2,925,000.'

"Castro said he wanted it understood this obligation would be discharged before he completed the next prisoner exchange. The Cubans agreed this was a personal obligation. They set about raising the money themselves."

CASTRO submitted extensive lists of what he wanted in food, clothing, and medicine.

When Donovan returned to the United States, he went to see a personal friend, John E.

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McKeen, president of Charles Pfizer Co. They decided to call in another old friend, John Thomas Connor of Merck, Sharp & Dohme.

Donovan and Connor were classmates at Harvard Law School, and served together under Dr. Vannevar Bush in the Office of Scientific Research and Development during World War II.

These two companies originally agreed to provide most of the drugs and medicines Donovan thought he might need. The supplies were packaged, and stood waiting at Idlewild Airport during most of the Cuban missile crisis.

Donovan took the drug company catalogs with him when he returned to Havana City. "I had to get them out because it was so bulky. It would take a lot of ships to transport it," he said.

At first, the Cuban dictator balked. Donovan found Castro "difficult" to deal with, but said "he treated me at all times with great courtesy."

After 10 days of haggling, Donovan walked out of a midnight session in cold anger. "I told them if they wanted to continue this, they should send me new lists of their requirements." The lists came through and were being analyzed just as the Cuban missile crisis intervened.

EVERYTHING remained at a standstill until after the edge was removed from the Cuban crisis when Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev agreed to withdraw his missiles. By that time the condition of the prisoners in Castro's jails was deteriorating rapidly.

Something had to be done to get them out before they died of disease, hopelessness, or malnutrition.

Donovan's friends advised him that the best way to expedite action now would be to lay the entire case before the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Assn., representing several hundred U.S. corporations.

"It was then that the attorney general assigned a whole team of Justice Department lawyers and volunteers whom we both solicited from leading law firms in New York and Washington. They worked day and night to carry out all the complicated legal rulings that were required," Donovan said.

"I explained to these companies that there was no compulsion to participate, and some elected not to.

"I told them that although this had the sympathetic support of the government, it was a private humanitarian affair. And I said that if they contributed, they would not be contributing to the government, but to the American Red Cross at the request of the Cuban Families Committee."